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141342Z Oct 02

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 VATICAN 004991

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DEPT FOR EUR/WE (MENNUITI, NEA/IAI)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/11/2012

TAGS: PREL PHUM IS PHUM IS PHUM IS VT VTPREL VTPREL

SUBJECT: JERUSALEM PATRIARCH PLEAS FOR U.S. INTERVENTION
WITH ISRAEL TO END DESPERATE PLIGHT IN PALESTINIAN
TERRITORIES

CLASSIFIED BY: AMBASSADOR JIM NICHOLSON, REASON E.O. 12958 1.5 (D).

11. (U) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST, PLEASE SEE LAST PARA.

12. (C) SUMMARY: AT THE SUGGESTION OF THE POPE, CATHOLIC
PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM MICHEL SABBAAH MADE AN URGENT PLEA TO
AMBASSADOR OCTOBER 10 FOR U.S. HELP TO STOP THE VIOLENCE,
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AMELIORATE THE INCREASINGLY DESPERATE PLIGHT OF THE
PALESTINIAN PEOPLE, AND MOVE THE PARTIES TOWARD MEANINGFUL
DIALOGUE. SABBAAH HAD MET WITH THE POPE THE DAY BEFORE TO
CONVEY HIS CONCERNS ABOUT THE SITUATION IN JERUSALEM AND THE
PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES. ACCORDING TO SABBAAH, BOTH THE
PALESTINIAN AND ISRAELI PEOPLE INCREASINGLY RECOGNIZED THAT
THE CURRENT CYCLE OF VIOLENCE SERVED NO PURPOSE, BUT THEY
NEEDED TO BE "SAVED" FROM THEIR CURRENT BLOODY IMPASSE BY
OUTSIDE PRESSURE. ONLY U.S. INTERVENTION, HE INSISTED, COULD
MOVE THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT FROM ITS CURRENT POLICY OF
REPRESSION. SABBAAH, WHO PARTICIPATES IN THE "ALEXANDRIA
GROUP" -- AN INTER-FAITH RELIGIOUS FORUM ENCOMPASSING
CHRISTIAN, JEWISH, AND MUSLIM LEADERS -- ASSERTED THAT THIS
GROUP HAD CONTACTS WITH HAMAS AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY,
AND COULD SECURE A CESSATION IN TERRORIST ATTACKS OF "MORE
THAN A MONTH" IF ONLY THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WOULD OFFER A
"REAL PROMISE" OF EASING THE PALESTINIANS' SUFFERING. SABBAAH
CONDEMNED PALESTINIAN TERRORISM AND "HATE SPEECH", BUT SAID
IT WAS A MANIFESTATION OF PALESTINIAN DESPERATION THAT WOULD
STOP ONLY WHEN THE OCCUPATION AND "WAR" ENDED. SEEING NO
SIGNS THAT THE SHARON GOVERNMENT WAS INTERESTED IN PEACE,
SABBAAH ASKED THE AMBASSADOR TO CONVEY TO THE PRESIDENT HIS
URGENT PLEA FOR INTERVENTION FROM THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION TO
SECURE SOME MEANINGFUL CONCESSION FROM THE GOI THAT WOULD
GIVE THE ALEXANDRIA GROUP THE LEVERAGE IT NEEDED TO SECURE A
CESSATION OF VIOLENCE FROM THE ARAB SIDE AND SET IN PLACE THE
BEGINNINGS OF REAL PEACE TALKS LEADING TO AN END TO ISRAELI
OCCUPATION. END SUMMARY.

MOUNTING DESPERATION IN PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES
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13. (C) AMBASSADOR RECEIVED A CALL FROM VATICAN FOREIGN
MINISTER EQUIVALENT ARCHBISHOP JEAN-LOUIS TAURAN OCTOBER 10,
WHO CONVEYED THE POPE'S REQUEST THAT THE AMBASSADOR MEET THAT
DAY WITH VISITING PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM MICHEL SABBAAH, WHO
WAS IN ROME TO SEE THE POPE ABOUT THE DETERIORATING SITUATION
IN THE HOLY LANDS. MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR AND STAFF,
SABBAAH AND THE VICAR OF JERUSALEM MADE AN URGENT, ALMOST
DESPERATE PLEA FOR UNITED STATES INTERVENTION TO STOP THE
VIOLENCE AND END THE UNTENABLE SITUATION FOR THE PALESTINIANS
IN THE HOLY LANDS. HE SAID THAT THE CURFEW FORBODE THEIR
MOVEMENT 24 HOURS PER DAY AND DEPRIVED THEM OF BASIC HUMAN
NECESSITIES. HE FURTHER SAID THAT BOTH THE PALESTINIAN AND
ISRAELI PEOPLE NEEDED "PROTECTION" AND "SALVATION" IN THE
FORM OF A U.S. OR UN MILITARY PRESENCE THAT WOULD PROVIDE
SECURITY FOR ALL. SABBAAH ASSERTED THAT THE ARAB WORLD WAS
READY FOR PEACE, THE PALESTINIAN WORLD WAS READY, AND THE
TIME WAS RIGHT FOR A MOVE TO PEACE. "THERE IS NO REASON FOR
THIS WAR TO GO ON," HE INSISTED. UNFORTUNATELY, IT APPEARED
TO HIM THAT THE SHARON GOVERNMENT HAD "NO INTEREST IN PEACE."
SABBAAH SAID THAT EVENTUALLY THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT WOULD
HAVE TO COME TO TERMS WITH THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE (AND RETURN
TO THE 1967 BOUNDARIES), AND THAT SINCE PEOPLE WERE DYING
EVERY DAY, IT WAS POINTLESS NOT TO MOVE IN THIS DIRECTION NOW
AND SAVE MANY LIVES.

14. (C) SABBAAH SKETCHED A GRIM PICTURE OF PALESTINIAN DAILY
LIFE UNDER SIEGE AND CURFEW, WITH SCHOOLS CLOSED, LIMITED
MOVEMENT POSSIBLE ONLY FOR THREE HOURS THREE TIMES A WEEK, NO
ECONOMIC LIFE, AND NO PROSPECTS FOR IMPROVEMENTS. HARSH
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ISRAELI REPRESSION, SABBAAH NOTED, HAS NOT RESULTED IN GREATER

SECURITY FOR THE ISRAELI PEOPLE. ON THE CONTRARY, "EVEN THE ISRAELIS" WERE SUFFERING, HE SAID. WITH PALESTINIANS LIVING UNDER SUCH DESPERATION, SABBAAH SAID IT WAS UNDERSTANDABLE THAT SOME WOULD RESORT TO "IMMORAL ACTS" LIKE SUICIDE BOMBING. HE CONDEMNED TERRORIST ACTS AS "MORALLY WRONG AND STRATEGICALLY WRONG," BUT ADDED THAT MOST PALESTINIANS CLAIM "AS LONG AS THE ISRAELIS ARE IN OUR TERRITORY MAKING WAR ON US, WE WILL MAKE WAR ON THEM." HE LAMENTED THAT PALESTINIANS WERE CONDEMNED FOR SUICIDE BOMBINGS, WHILE ISRAEL WAS ABLE TO KILL INNOCENT CIVILIANS AND DESTROY PROPERTY BY TRADITIONAL MILITARY MEANS THAT EARNED LESS APPROBATION FROM THE INTERNATIONAL COMMUNITY.

ONLY THE U.S. CAN SAVE US FROM OURSELVES

15. (C) WITH THE VIOLENCE AND OCCUPATION PRESSURES UNRELENTING, SABBAAH FEARED THAT THE SHARON GOVERNMENT WAS DEAF TO ANY DIALOGUE, AND THEREFORE BELIEVED THAT ONLY THE

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INFO LOG-00 NP-00 CIAE-00 INL-00 USNW-00 DODE-00 PERC-00
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FM AMEMBASSY VATICAN
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
INFO ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE

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BUSH ADMINISTRATION COULD GET THROUGH. WHEN THE AMBASSADOR POINTED OUT THAT THE GOI WAS NOT ALWAYS RESPONSIVE TO U.S. DEMANDS, SABBAAH REPLIED: "IF YOU CAN'T MOVE SHARON, THEN ALL IS LOST FOR THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE." HE NOTED THAT THE ISSUE IS HOW MUCH PRESSURE THE U.S. WAS WILLING TO BRING TO BEAR ON SHARON. IN THE ABSENCE OF SUCH PRESSURE, HE FEARED THERE WOULD BE FIVE OR TEN MORE YEARS OF VIOLENCE UNTIL A NEW

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ISRAELI GOVERNMENT BROUGHT IT TO AN END AND BEGAN A NEW DIALOGUE. IN THE MEANTIME THOUSANDS WOULD DIE. SABBAAH REITERATED HIS REQUEST THAT WE CONVEY TO THE PRESIDENT HIS URGENT PLEA FOR AN INTERVENTION WITH SHARON TO CONVINCE HIM TO EASE THE SITUATION IN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES AND JOIN IN STEPS TOWARD A LASTING CEASEFIRE. SABBAAH NOTED THAT HE AND THE OTHER RELIGIOUS LEADERS OF JERUSALEM HAD PREVIOUSLY REQUESTED A MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT, AND HOPED TO BE ABLE TO PRESENT THEIR CONCERNS DIRECTLY IN THE NEAR FUTURE. AMBASSADOR PROMISED TO CONVEY SABBAAH'S COMMENTS DIRECTLY TO WASHINGTON.

16. (C) AMBASSADOR ASKED SABBAAH ABOUT THE STATUS OF HIS OWN EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A DIALOGUE WITH THE ISRAELI GOVERNMENT. SABBAAH SAID HE HAS MET WITH DEPUTY FOREIGN MINISTER MELCHIOR, THE ONLY GOI OFFICIAL WHO REGULARLY SPOKE WITH HIM, BUT THAT MELCHIOR MAKES CLEAR THAT HE CANNOT SPEAK ON BEHALF OF THE GOVERNMENT, AND GENERALLY PROMISES ONLY TO CONVEY SABBAAH'S CONCERNS. HE SAID HE HAS HAD A REQUEST IN TO MEET DIRECTLY WITH PM SHARON FOR SEVERAL MONTHS, BUT THE PM'S OFFICE HAS NOT RESPONDED. HE BELIEVED SHARON WAS NOT INTERESTED IN PEACE, AND WAS BENT ON EXPELLING ALL BUT A FEW THOUSAND PALESTINIANS FROM THE WEST BANK IN ORDER TO CREATE A GREATER ISRAEL.

ALEXANDRIA GROUP: CEASEFIRE POSSIBLE WITH ISRAELI COMMITMENT

17. (C) SABBAAH TOLD US THAT THE "ALEXANDRIA GROUP" OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS FROM THE MUSLIN, JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN
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FAITHS CREATED LAST JANUARY MAINTAINS GOOD CONTACTS WITH

HAMAS AND THE PALESTINIAN AUTHORITY. SABBAAH SAID HE HAD ASKED HAMAS WHAT IT WOULD TAKE TO STOP THE VIOLENCE AND THE REPLY WAS THAT AS LONG AS THE OCCUPATION CONTINUED, HAMAS WAS AT "WAR"; WHEN THE OCCUPATION CEASED, THE WAR WOULD BE OVER. HE SAID THAT AFTER THEY HAD SPOKEN WITH SHEIK YASSIM, HAMAS HAD REFRAINED FROM ATTACKS FOR OVER FOUR WEEKS. DURING THAT PERIOD, HE SAID, THE ISRAELI SIDE HAD CONTINUED ITS OCCUPATION AND ASSASSINATION POLICY, AND SO THE TERROR ATTACKS WERE RENEWED.

18. (C) PRESSED BY THE AMBASSADOR ABOUT CURRENT DIFFICULTIES IN ESTABLISHING AN IMPROVED SECURITY SITUATION WITHOUT PALESTINIAN SUICIDE ATTACKS, SABBAAH INSISTED THAT THE ALEXANDRIA GROUP COULD USE ITS GOOD OFFICES TO OBTAIN A REAL CESSATION IN THE TERRORIST ATTACKS, FROM HAMAS, THE PA, AND POTENTIALLY EVEN HIZBOLLAH, FOR "A MONTH." BUT THEY COULD DO SO ONLY IF THEY HAD SOMETHING CONCRETE FROM THE ISRAELI SIDE TO TAKE TO THE TABLE. AT AMBASSADOR'S QUERY AS TO WHAT WOULD TYPE OF STEPS WOULD BE NEEDED FROM THE ISRAELI SIDE TO ACHIEVE SUCH A CESSATION OF ATTACKS, SABBAAH CONCEDED THAT SOMETHING AS SIMPLE AS A REAL PLEDGE FROM THE GOI TO EASE THE CURFEWS FOR A WEEK COULD CREATE A FOUNDATION ON WHICH TO BUILD, FOLLOWED BY A RETURN TO "A MORE NORMAL LIFE." FOLLOWING UP ON SABBAAH'S INDICATION THAT THE ALEXANDRIA GROUP WOULD BE MEETING UNDER THE AUSPICES OF THE ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY OCTOBER 24-25 AT LAMBETH HOUSE IN LONDON, AMBASSADOR URGED SABBAAH TO DEVELOP HIS PROPOSAL WITHIN THE ALEXANDRIA GROUP. WHILE CAUTIONING THAT IT WOULD BE A DIFFICULT TASK TO SET THE ALEXANDRIA GROUP OF RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON A POLITICAL PATH, HE EXPRESSED A WILLINGNESS TO
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EXPLORE WAYS IN WHICH THE GROUP COULD PROMOTE A CESSATION OF VIOLENCE AND CREATE SOME SPACE FOR A RESTORATION OF DIALOGUE.

PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP AND REFORM

19. (C) RESPONDING TO U.S. CONCERNS ABOUT THE IMPORTANCE OF POLITICAL REFORM AND RESPONSIBLE LEADERSHIP WITHIN THE PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES, SABBAAH DISMISSED THESE AS "SECONDARY CONCERNS." "EVEN WITH THE BEST ADMINISTRATION, FREE FROM CORRUPTION, VIOLENCE WILL STILL BE THERE IF NOTHING IS DONE ABOUT THE OCCUPATION," HE OBSERVED. ON THE LEADERSHIP ISSUE, SABBAAH CAUTIONED THAT U.S. AND ISRAELI PRESSURE TO GET RID OF ARAFAT WILL HAVE THE OPPOSITE EFFECT. "THE MORE YOU SAY THAT ARAFAT IS IRRELEVANT, THE MORE RELEVANT HE BECOMES." WHEREAS IF THE U.S. AND ISRAEL JUST IGNORED HIM AND LET THE PALESTINIAN PEOPLE TAKE CARE OF IT, "YOU WILL GET THE LEADERSHIP YOU WANT," HE ADDED. HE DESCRIBED ARAFAT AS "PRISONER," WHO COULD DO NOTHING, AND TO WHOM NO ONE LISTENS, BUT WHO GROWS IN POPULARITY THE MORE HE IS HUMILIATED.

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ACTION EUR-00

INFO	LOG-00	NP-00	CIAE-00	INL-00	USNW-00	DODE-00	PERC-00
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	NSAE-00	SSO-00	SS-00	DSCC-00	PRM-00	DRL-02	SAS-00
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COMMENT

110. (C) SABBAAH'S MEETING WITH THE POPE AND THE POPE'S RECOMMENDATION FOR A MEETING WITH THE AMBASSADOR REFLECT THE
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POPE'S INCREASING CONCERN FOR THE SITUATION IN THE HOLY LANDS
AND CONSISTENT OPPOSITION TO HEAVY HANDED ISRAELI REPRESSIVE

MEASURES. WHILE WE ARE CONFIDENT SABBABH MAINTAINS TIES TO BOTH HAMAS AND THE PA, AND MAY BE ABLE TO PLAY A USEFUL ROLE IN CONSTRAINING ATTACKS, WE LEAVE IT TO WASHINGTON, TEL AVIV AND JERUSALEM TO ASSESS WHETHER THESE TIES WOULD BE STRONG ENOUGH TO HELP ACHIEVE A CESSATION OF SUICIDE ATTACKS, AS HE MAINTAINS. GIVEN THE CURRENT IMPASSE, HOWEVER, WE BELIEVE THAT INTER-FAITH RELIGIOUS EFFORTS SUCH AS THAT OF THE ALEXANDRIA GROUP CAN CONTRIBUTE TO THE CREATION OF SOME DIALOGUE IN A SITUATION WHERE VERY LITTLE EXISTS. IN ANY EVENT, SABBABH'S DESPERATE PLEA FOR GREATER U.S. ENGAGEMENT -- A PLEA ECHOED IN EVERY MEETING WITH SENIOR HOLY SEE OFFICIALS -- REFLECTS A STRONGLY HELD VIEW HERE THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF GREATER U.S. PRESSURE ON SHARON, THERE IS NO HOPE FOR AN END TO THE TRAGIC CYCLE OF VIOLENCE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. SABBABH, A PALESTINIAN NATIONALIST AND A CATHOLIC CLERGYMAN, UNDERScoreD TO THE AMBASSADOR HIS CONDEMNATION BOTH OF TERRORISM AND THE HATE SPEECH THAT EXISTS IN PALESTINIAN MEDIA AND SCHOOLS. HE SAID HE PREACHES TO HIS OWN FLOCK TO "LOVE THE ISRAELIS, EVEN THOSE WHO DRIVE TANKS OVER YOUR HOUSES." THIS WAS "HARD TO DO," HE ADDED, "BUT IT IS THE CHRISTIAN THING TO DO." ACTION REQUEST: EMBASSY IS PREPARED TO CONTINUE TO ENGAGE WITH THE HOLY SEE ON THIS TRACK IF THE DEPARTMENT BELIEVES IT WILL BE HELPFUL IN ENCOURAGING DIALOGUE AND REDUCING VIOLENCE. PLEASE ADVISE IF FOLLOWUP ACTION IS REQUIRED. POST WOULD ALSO BE INTERESTED IN ANY READOUT OF THE LONDON MEETING OF THE ALEXANDRIA GROUP. NICHOLSON

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